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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2100 (2013), by which the Council established the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

2. In the resolution, the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed of the situation in Mali and the implementation of the mandate of MINUSMA. In particular, the Council asked me to report every three months, from 1 July 2013, with updates on the security situation and the priority political elements, as well as with relevant information on the progress, promotion and protection of human rights and international humanitarian law. In addition, I was asked to include in my reports a review of troop levels, force generation and deployment of all constituent elements of MINUSMA. The present report covers the period from 30 September to 21 December 2013.

II. Political process

3. The reporting period was marked by further important progress towards the full restoration of constitutional order, with transparent and well-organized legislative elections. Notable efforts were also made towards national consultations and reconstruction. However, less progress was achieved in other important areas, particularly with respect to the re-establishment of State authority and basic services in the north and the implementation of the preliminary agreement, including the cantonment of armed groups. The meetings of the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee and the Mixed Technical Commission on Security, scheduled for November and December, were not held.

A. Dialogue and reconciliation

4. Following the decision on 18 September by the Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) and the Haut conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad (HCUA) to suspend their participation in the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, my Special Representative travelled on 4 October to Ouagadougou where he met President Compaoré and representatives of the armed groups. The latter subsequently

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issued a statement announcing the resumption of their participation in the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee.

5. Following intense diplomatic efforts by my Special Representative for Mali, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the European Union, the Government released 11 prisoners as a confidence-building measure on 29 October. Arrest warrants against four former MNLA and HCUA members of parliament were also subsequently lifted.

6. The Government had insisted that MNLA vacate the Governorate building and the national radio station in Kidal before the resumption of the meetings of the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee. On 8 November, my Special Representative led a delegation of representatives of the international community to Ouagadougou to meet the signatories to the preliminary agreement. Following consultations, the political coordination of the armed groups signed on the same day a declaration committing to vacate the Kidal Governorate and the radio station by 14 November. On that date, MNLA vacated the Governorate and the radio station in the presence of a high-level delegation from MINUSMA and other members of the Mixed Technical Commission on Security.

7. The Government initiated a series of national consultative events on the situation in the north. From 21 to 23 October, the national forum on decentralization in Mali brought local government actors and community representatives, including those from refugee camps, together with experts and international partners. Meeting participants sought ways to address issues pertaining to the north, including the devolution of power and the provision of financial and technical resources to local government structures. The Government expressed its commitment to implementing the measures necessary for achieving inclusive and genuine decentralization.

8. From 1 to 3 November, the Government hosted a national conference on the north of Mali, an initiative to promote good governance, institutional reform, economic and social development and to reinforce national unity and security in northern Mali. The Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad (MAA) and the Coordination des mouvements et forces patriotiques de résistance (CMFPR) participated in the meeting. However, MNLA and HCUA declined to attend, insisting that any national dialogue should be organized in full consultation with all parties to the preliminary agreement.

9. On 27 November, the Government launched the local and regional conferences on Gao, at which the recommendations arising from the national conference on the north were discussed at the community and regional levels. At the end of the meeting, a road map for the Gao region was adopted, which included provisions for inter and intracommunal dialogue and reconciliation, security and development. The Government has announced its intention to hold similar local and regional meetings in Mopti, Kidal, Timbuktu and other regions in 2014.

B. Elections

10. The legislative elections marked a second major step in the re-establishment of constitutional order. The first round of legislative elections was held on 24 November. The voter turnout stood at 38.49 per cent nationwide, compared with 33 per cent in the legislative elections held in 2007. The second round was held on 15 December with

the participation of approximately 37 per cent of registered voters. In spite of minor incidents recorded in the Diré constituency, Timbuktu region, and some communes of Bamako, international observers assessed the polls as generally free and fair and noted improvements in the electoral process since the presidential elections.

11. MINUSMA provided logistical and security support throughout the electoral process. The Mission facilitated the deployment of equipment and personnel of the national electoral authority to northern regions, including Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal and Mopti, and recruited 55 electoral logistics assistants, one for each voting jurisdiction. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided financial support through an electoral assistance project for the hiring of polling site staff, the printing of voter lists and the reactivation of the call centre for voters. It also supported civic education awareness campaigns through 62 civil society organizations to mobilize voters and reduce the number of spoilt ballots.

12. The Government encouraged refugees and internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, with a view to ensuring inclusiveness and the highest possible voter participation. From 15 to 31 October, a special operation was conducted to transfer refugees and internally displaced returnees to the polling stations of their choice within the voting district of their current place of residence. In total, 163,423 voters, primarily internally displaced persons but also a limited number of refugees, were transferred from one constituency to another.

13. The Government also promoted the participation of women in the electoral process. On 3 October, MINUSMA participated in a meeting, organized by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and chaired by the Prime Minister, aimed at raising the awareness of political parties on the need to increase the number of women on the electoral lists for the legislative elections. During the event, the Prime Minister announced that extra time on public media would be allocated for female candidates. This was followed by similar measures being taken by private media. The Mission also provided technical expertise at a seminar on electoral communication strategies for female candidates in the legislative elections.

III. Security and stabilization

A. Security situation

14. The reporting period was characterized by a marked deterioration in the security situation in the north. A number of attacks using improvised explosive devices revealed that terrorist and other groups had reorganized themselves and regained some ability to operate. Kidal saw renewed flare-ups of tension, and intercommunal clashes were reported in the Gao and Timbuktu regions.

15. The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa claimed responsibility for several incidents in Gao. On 7 October, seven rockets were launched on the city of Gao, critically wounding one Malian soldier. The same day, a bridge located 45 km south-east of Ansongo was partially damaged by an improvised explosive device. On 30 October, two additional rockets were launched on Gao city. On 15 November, at least one rocket was launched in Ménaka. On 21 November, three additional rockets were launched at Gao city. These rocket attacks did not result in any casualties.

16. On 8 November, two armed elements were arrested in Ti-n-Anzarargane (Gao region) during a coordinated patrol by the Malian armed forces, MINUSMA and Operation Serval. An exchange of fire between MNLA members and a detachment of the Malian armed forces resulted in the death of three MNLA combatants and the injury of at least one other.

17. Intercommunal tensions continue to be a source of concern. On 19 October, nine individuals of Arab origin were kidnapped by Tuaregs in Tabankort (Gao region). In a related development on 25 October, a Tuareg man was abducted by Arab men between Tarkint and Hersan in the area of Bourem (Gao region). On 31 October, in Timbuktu region, nine Arabs were killed by members of the Tuareg community in Tilemsi, on the border with Mauritania, in what appears to be a series of retaliatory attacks between the two groups.

18. On 23 October, four individuals drove and detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device into a MINUSMA checkpoint in Tessalit. Seven people were killed, including four adult civilians, a six-year-old boy and two MINUSMA peacekeepers. Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility for the attack. On 4 November, four civilians were killed and seven injured by a command-wire improvised explosive device on the road between Ménaka and Ansongo. On 13 November, a Malian army vehicle escorting two foreign journalists was targeted by an explosive formed penetrator device near Almoustarat in Gao region. A Malian soldier was injured. On 20 November, a Serval vehicle was targeted by what was apparently a radio-controlled improvised explosive device in Kidal, causing injuries to three French soldiers. On 30 November, a suicide bomber activated a person-borne improvised explosive device near Ménaka, killing himself but causing no other casualties. On 14 December, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device was detonated in Kidal, killing two MINUSMA Senegalese soldiers and injuring seven other peacekeepers and four Malian soldiers. In the wake of that attack, amid rumours that two vehicles laden with explosives remained in the city ready to detonate, on 16 December MINUSMA peacekeepers guarding the Kidal Governorate fired at a vehicle approaching their position at high speed when the driver ignored an order to stop. In two other instances during the same day, MINUSMA troops fired at motorcyclists who had driven close to their vehicles and wounded a rider. The following day, Kidal shopkeepers demonstrated to protest those incidents. On 21 December, an improvised explosive device hit a MINUSMA logistics convoy on the road between Gao and Anefis, injuring a peacekeeper.

19. On 1 November, violent demonstrations took place in Gao and Ménaka. In Gao, hundreds of demonstrators staged a protest over a disputed passenger list provided by the Government to MINUSMA for air transportation of delegates to the national conference on the north, in Bamako. They demonstrated outside the Governorate, the mayor's residence and United Nations accommodations, throwing stones and burning tires. Barricades blocked all the main roads. The situation returned to normal the following day after 46 additional regional delegates were flown to Bamako with the support of MINUSMA. Demonstrations also occurred in Ménaka, where the demonstrators' anger was directed at the local government owing to frustration over the lack of basic services, including the provision of water and electricity, an ill-functioning justice system, insecurity and the worsening economic conditions.

20. The deterioration of the security situation was particularly acute in Kidal. In addition to asymmetric attacks, on 2 November, two French journalists were abducted and killed in the city of Kidal. Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and the killings. On 3 November, in Tassik, 43 km south-south-east of Kidal, two soldiers of the Malian armed forces assaulted three emissaries sent by a traditional leader of Kidal to settle an internal dispute.

21. On 28 November, the Prime Minister and a delegation of government officials intended to visit Kidal to install officially the Governor in the Governorate building that had recently been vacated by MNLA. As previously agreed with the Governor of Kidal, the Malian armed forces, Serval and a MINUSMA formed police unit deployed around the airstrip. Approximately 100 civilians gathered at the airstrip to demonstrate against the visit. Demonstrators threw stones at the Malian army personnel, who fired their weapons, injuring four demonstrators. The Prime Minister called off his visit. Although Serval and MINUSMA ensured that the civilians who were wounded in the incident received prompt medical attention, one of the women died, on 5 December, in Bamako. On 16 December, five rockets or mortars exploded in the vicinity of the joint Serval-MINUSMA camp.

22. Operation Serval intervened four times in support of MINUSMA in situations of imminent and serious threat. At Tessalit, on 23 October, following the asymmetric attack against MINUSMA, Serval provided immediate support through the medical evacuation of six wounded peacekeepers and the defusing of residual explosive devices. Serval also helped with the response to attacks on MINUSMA in Ménaka on three occasions in November. Two incidents involved attempts by armed groups to gain access to MINUSMA premises, and a third was in response to an attack on MINUSMA in Ti-n-Anzarargane.

B. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

23. The preliminary agreement provides, inter alia, for the cantonment of armed groups as a first step, pending a broader disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement. The current cantonment process serves as an interim stabilization measure, but important challenges persist. MNLA and HCUA, which claim to comprise between 7,000 and 10,000 members in total, have submitted to the Mixed Technical Commission on Security a list of 9,088 combatants for Kidal region alone. However, only 1,847 of those combatants have been listed for cantonment. An even smaller number is actually cantoned in three sites in Kidal region. Armed groups point to the prevailing insecurity in the north as a key factor preventing the cantonment of more combatants.

24. MINUSMA supports the cantonment process at the strategic and technical levels. In addition to providing logistical support, food and water to MNLA and HCUA combatants in the three existing cantonment sites, MINUSMA is helping the Government to design a cantonment strategy in order to better define the scope of the process and eventual transition towards the necessary disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. The Mission is also identifying sources of funding to enhance logistical support to the existing cantonment sites as well as the possible establishment of eight additional sites, including for combatants of the Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad and Coordination des mouvements et forces patriotiques de

résistance. In addition to material and technical support, MINUSMA is also advocating for the implementation of community-based initiatives to accompany the process and sustain a peaceful environment in the communities adjacent to cantonment sites.

C. Mine Action Service

25. The Mine Action Service of the United Nations continues to coordinate and task nine explosive ordnance disposal teams deployed by international mine action operators to survey, mark and clear dangerous areas in Mopti, Segou, Timbuktu and Gao regions. Since 1 October, 356 items of unexploded ordnance have been cleared. From January 2013 to date, 379 villages have been surveyed and 40 contaminated areas identified and marked. The Mine Action Service and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have confirmed 88 civilian casualties resulting from explosive remnants of war since the beginning of the conflict (13 killed and 75 injured), including 6 children killed and 51 others injured.

26. The Mine Action Service continued to provide awareness training for the Malian Defence and Security Forces, humanitarian actors, United Nations personnel and MINUSMA contingents on threats from explosive remnants of war, landmines and improvised explosive devices. A second explosive ordnance disposal course was completed for 33 members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces in Bamako, on 6 October. A total of 20 operators who successfully completed the course have been selected for eight additional weeks of advanced training at the Humanitarian Demining Training Centre in Benin. A separate four-week training course on stockpile safety management was also completed by 32 members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces on 10 October.

IV. Re-establishment of State authority

27. The re-establishment and consolidation of State authority throughout the northern part of the country continued at a slow pace despite the establishment of policies by the Government to promote the return of prefects and subprefects to Mopti, Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal regions. A significant number of State officials, including those responsible for key technical services, have yet to resume their functions owing to persistent insecurity and deficient infrastructure and equipment, particularly in Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. UNDP has launched projects to rehabilitate public infrastructure and to provide furniture and equipment for administrative services at the prefecture level.

A. Security sector reform

28. On 8 November, President Keita appointed a new Chief of Defence Staff, a new Director-General of the National Police and a new chief of the intelligence service.

29. On 2 December, the Government officially launched the defence sector reform process by creating 11 working groups to develop a holistic strategy. The working groups will address doctrine, restructuring of the armed forces, territorial and operational organization of defence, logistics support, operational capacity, human

resources management, training, intelligence, regional cooperation and communications.

B. Law enforcement, justice and corrections institutions

30. The presence of the Malian police, gendarmerie and national guard in the north remains very limited, but efforts to increase their numbers continue. As at 16 December, 207 police officers, 367 gendarmes and 487 national guards had been deployed to Gao, Kidal, Mopti and Timbuktu. Lack of basic infrastructure, such as courts, prisons, offices and accommodation, as well as security concerns, have impeded the redeployment of judicial authorities to the northern regions, especially in Kidal. To date only two prosecutors and six corrections officers have been redeployed to Gao and Timbuktu. Weaknesses in the administration of justice in Kidal could lead to impunity for crimes. As the authority of judicial officers is not recognized by local residents, most violations and crimes are handled by traditional leaders. Alleged perpetrators of common crimes often go unpunished.

31. MINUSMA continues to provide technical and logistical support to the Ministry of Justice for the deployment of small teams of justice and corrections personnel to the north in order to plan and prepare for the refurbishment of premises and the eventual resumption of justice and corrections activities in Gao and Timbuktu. The Mission also provides support to the correctional administration in the formulation of a strategic development plan. Technical advice has also been provided to develop strategies to enhance access to justice, manage judicial reform and establish the judicial hubs that will help decrease the workload of the tribunal of the Commune III of Bamako, which has hitherto been processing terrorism-related charges.

V. Human rights protection

A. Human rights

32. MINUSMA continued to document human rights violations and abuses, including killings, abductions, torture and sexual violence perpetrated by elements of the Malian armed forces and by armed groups in the northern regions. At least 4 soldiers were killed and 12 disappeared during the clashes that took place in Kati on 30 September between different factions of the Malian army. On 24 October, a Tuareg man was killed at his home in Abeibara, Kidal, by three men identified as members of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb. On 2 November, a group of five women from the Songhai community were raped by eight armed men in the area of Goundam, Timbuktu region.

33. On 31 October, an investigating judge issued 17 summonses to military personnel, including General Amadou Haya Sanogo, in connection with violence committed in 2012. On 27 November, General Sanogo appeared before the investigating judge on charges of complicity in abduction related to the disappearance of 23 soldiers following the attempted coup of 30 April 2012. The judge ordered his detention. A total of 28 other soldiers found at the residence of General Sanogo were also arrested and are currently being detained at a gendarmerie camp in Bamako. During the night of 3 to 4 December, in the context

of its investigation of General Sanogo, the gendarmerie found a mass grave of 21 bodies believed to be those of missing "red berets" in Diago (Koulikoro region).

34. MINUSMA continued to monitor intercommunal feuds between northern communities. The Mission and the United Nations country team also conducted protection assessment missions to areas prone to intercommunal violence, in particular in the region of Timbuktu, to monitor and engage with local authorities.

35. The number of conflict-related arrests has declined compared with the previous reporting period. Some of the arrested individuals were returning refugees, most of them from the Tuareg and Arab communities. Most of the arrested individuals are accused of association with armed groups during the occupation. MINUSMA has unrestricted access to detention centres, except for those under the control of State security. The Mission has interviewed eight former detainees who reported being tortured during their detention by State security.

36. Pursuant to article 18 of the preliminary agreement, between 30 September and 16 December the authorities of Mali released 54 conflict-related detainees, including 18 who were included on a MNLA/HCUA list of 121 detainees.

37. MINUSMA continued to organize human rights trainings for State and non-State actors (members of non-governmental organizations and personnel of civil society organizations) as well as the Mission's military component. Training sessions on human rights and international humanitarian law were organized for over 700 staff members of the national police, the gendarmerie, the military and civil society organizations. MINUSMA troops in Bamako and northern Mali also received human rights training.

B. Protection of civilians

38. MINUSMA continued to engage actively in early warning and early response mechanisms for the protection of civilians. Assessment missions were carried out in areas prone to intercommunal violence and to clashes between the Malian Defence and Security Forces and armed groups. They monitored and reported threats to civilians, reached out to local communities and engaged with authorities as part of prevention and response efforts.

C. Conflict-related sexual violence

39. Incidents of sexual violence and rape remain a source of concern in Mali, particularly in the north. From 1 January to 31 October 2013, 276 cases of rape were reported, including 68 cases involving children. The majority of those cases were in Timbuktu and Gao. The Government has taken measures to address those crimes by mandating the judicial authorities to prioritize cases of sexual violence, but efforts to investigate such crimes and identify perpetrators have been hampered by the slow return of the judicial authorities to the north.

40. The United Nations continues to support action against conflict-related sexual violence. Mechanisms for monitoring, analysis and reporting have been established, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has provided post-rape treatment at health facilities in the affected areas, mostly in Gao and Timbuktu. MINUSMA has also engaged in a series of meetings with civil society organizations, including

human rights non-governmental organizations, to collect data on conflict-related sexual violence with a view to improving analysis and understanding of the patterns and trends of sexual violence in conflict-affected areas. An assessment of the full scope of sexual violence is difficult, as fear of reprisal or rejection by families prevents survivors from reporting crimes and/or from accepting alternative settlements, such as reparations in the form of cash or other material goods.

D. Child protection

41. Children in the north remain vulnerable to violence, including sexual violence. Between 1 October and 12 December, one child was killed in the context of the conflict. Basic social services for child protection, starting with schools, are still not fully functional. MINUSMA and UNICEF are working with the Government of Mali, international non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations to reinforce community-based child protection mechanisms. In 2013, the United Nations and partners in Mali reached 2,180 gender-based violence survivors, including 381 children, through the provision of essential services such as medical and psychosocial assistance.

42. As at 16 December, nine children formerly associated with armed groups remained in detention. They were arrested before the signing, on 1 July, of a protocol by the Government and the United Nations. The United Nations, especially MINUSMA and UNICEF, have been advocating the release of those children and have called for their physical and psychosocial rehabilitation and social reintegration. In October, five boys previously associated with armed groups were reunited with their families after staying in UNICEF-supported transit centres while their families were being traced. On 31 October, one boy was arrested for association with an armed group; he was subsequently released. In November, 10 boys from the UNICEF-supported transit centres were reunified with their families. Their reunification was delayed for two weeks because of security concerns in their community of origin. As at 16 December, there were 12 boys in the two UNICEF-supported transit centres.

VI. Early recovery and development

43. The delivery of basic social services remains limited in the north, with only a low number of civil servants having resumed their duties. Access to health care has improved: 77 per cent of the health centres in the north are partially or fully operational (compared with 35 per cent during the previous reporting period). Despite the UNICEF-led "Back to school" campaign supporting the return of 500,000 children (200,000 in the north and 300,000 in the south), there are fewer students enrolled than before the crisis. Security concerns and the absence of teachers are still preventing the reopening of 22 per cent of the schools in Timbuktu and 32 per cent of the schools in Gao, while only three schools in Kidal, accommodating 279 students are functional, compared with 57 schools accommodating 7,938 students before the crisis.

44. MINUSMA is strengthening its operational capacity to address rapid recovery needs in Mali through quick-impact projects and the Trust Fund in Support of Peace and Stability in Mali. Nine quick-impact projects (worth $309,280) were approved for funding covering the rehabilitation of key public infrastructure and services (public spaces and squares, access to water, garbage collection and public lighting)

in Gao and Kidal; provision of livelihood and generation of revenue for vulnerable communities (support to agricultural production, handicrafts) in Gao and Timbuktu; awareness raising (community radios, conflict transformation training); and gender (rehabilitation of women centres) in Gao and Kidal. Additional projects are being developed for the rehabilitation of tribunals, prisons and police stations, the refurbishment of governmental offices, and improvement of access to water and electricity in Mopti, Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal. The Trust Fund in Support of Peace and Security in Mali has received an additional $4 million, bringing the total to $11 million. Funds have already been allocated to support the operational needs of cantoning armed groups in the north, while additional proposals for reinforcing the capacity of the Malian Defence and Security Forces, supporting the return of the administration in the north and facilitating the mediation process are under consideration. The mobilization of additional resources is also under way, including from the Peacebuilding Fund of the United Nations, through discussions with the Government on priority needs.

45. Economic growth prospects are positive for 2013: the gross domestic product (GDP), which contracted in 2012 by 0.4 per cent, will grow by an estimated 5.15 per cent in 2013. A more favourable security and political environment is having a positive economic impact. However, the preliminary results of the joint Government-international community assessment of the agricultural season foresee a cereal production decrease of 19 per cent compared with 2012/13 and a 9 per cent drop compared with the five-year average. External assistance is high: budget support from development partners represented 6.8 per cent of GDP in 2013, compared with 0.7 per cent in 2012.

46. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which continues to support the rehabilitation of the cultural heritage of Mali, recently launched a training programme for MINUSMA personnel on its protection. UNESCO provided emergency assistance to restore Djingareyber Mosque and private libraries that sustained damage from the suicide bombing on 28 September. On 1 November, UNESCO organized a second information meeting in Bamako with local and international stakeholders on the rehabilitation of the cultural heritage in the northern region of Mali, in order to share the action plan agreed in February 2013 and call for donor support. About $3 million of a total of $11 million have been raised.

VII. Humanitarian situation

47. The country still faces serious food insecurity and malnutrition. More than 1.1 million people receive food aid. Since the beginning of 2013, 227,000 children under 5 years of age were admitted to nutrition rehabilitation units. A total of 89,000 children and pregnant and lactating women received preventive nutritional support (blanket feeding). Projections based on the results of the Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions surveys conducted in 2013 estimate that 496,000 children 6 to 59 months of age will be at risk of acute malnutrition in 2014, of whom 136,000 are at risk of severe malnutrition and 360,000 at risk of moderate malnutrition. While the severity of malnutrition rates is higher in the north, the majority of malnourished children (85 per cent) are located in the southern regions of Mali where population density is much higher.

48. Malian refugees and internally displaced persons continue to return to their areas of origin. As at 27 November, the number of internally displaced Malians was estimated at 254,822 people (against 283,000 in late October), while approximately 166,173 Malian refugees remain in neighbouring countries (Mauritania: 66,198; Niger: 50,000 and Burkina Faso: 49,975). A survey conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in southern Mali (Segou, Koulikouro and Bamako) assessed that 84 per cent of internally displaced households surveyed wished to return to their regions of origin, security conditions permitting. IOM reports that at least 137,000 people have already returned to Timbuktu and Gao regions in spite of the persistent insecurity and absence of basic social services. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 9,419 refugees have spontaneously repatriated to Mali between April and November 2013.

49. The action plan for the north developed by the United Nations in September continues to guide the international response to the most urgent humanitarian needs, as well as early recovery activities to restore livelihoods and support social cohesion. On 4 December, the consolidated appeal process for Mali was funded at only 50 per cent, or $239 million out of the $477 million requested.

VIII. Establishment of the United Nations Multidimenstional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

50. As at 16 December, the military strength of MINUSMA stood at 5,539 personnel, including 14 women, out of an authorized strength of 11,200. The Mission has five infantry battalions deployed in most key areas, including Tessalit, Aguelhok, Kidal, Gao, Ménaka and Ansongo in Sector East, and Gossi, Douentza, Sévaré, Timbuktu, Goundam and Diably in Sector West.

51. An initial shipment of equipment, sourced by the Trust Fund for Support to the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), has been delivered to Mali and is being transferred to the 11 contingents that transitioned from AFISMA. Those assets consist largely of field defence stores such as gabions and concertina wire. The distribution of the items will improve the physical security of military personnel in the sectors. A balance of approximately $24 million remains available and will continue to be used to provide additional support to these military and police units. The time period given to former AFISMA contingents to upgrade their equipment to United Nations standards or develop a credible programme to do so in a timely manner ended on 31 October. All troop- and police-contributing countries have demonstrated serious commitment, along with donors that pledged substantial amounts. Equipment has been purchased either by the contingent's country or by bilateral donors but is still to be delivered to Mali owing to the long distances and other logistical factors.

52. A total of 300 troops and two level II hospitals have deployed during the reporting period. The United Nations Secretariat has identified sources to provide 90 per cent of the outstanding required military units, including two infantry battalions, two helicopter units (one utility, one armed) and an "all sources information fusion unit". Logistical and other arrangements needed to deploy those units are under way. Additional capabilities to be generated include a military police company, a medium-utility helicopter unit and an armed helicopter unit.

53. Progress has also been made in the deployment of the MINUSMA police component. As at 16 December, 956 police personnel of the authorized total of 1,440 were deployed. This includes 73 individual police officers, of 320 planned, and six of eight formed police units totalling 883 personnel. Since my last report, 157 police personnel, including one formed police unit, arrived in Mali. A total of 41 police officers are stationed in Bamako, while 32 are deployed in the north. Two formed police units are based in Bamako and one each based in Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal and Mopti. The Secretariat has identified one additional formed police unit, but is pacing its recruitment and deployment owing to the limited accommodation available. With regard to civilian staff, the Mission has now filled almost three quarters of the 414 international posts authorized and is shifting its focus to the recruitment of national general service staff.

54. Throughout the reporting period, Operation Serval supported MINUSMA with engineering services, including for the maintenance of airfields, the disposal of explosive devices, medical evacuations and close air support. Engineering support proved critical, given that MINUSMA engineers will deploy only early in 2014.

55. During the reporting period, the threat of targeted terrorism, notably kidnapping, has increased north of the Niger river. The Designated Official, the Security Management Team and the security team in Mali are reviewing the minimum operating security standards and physical security measures at all premises where the United Nations is located. To maintain staff awareness and preparedness, 456 United Nations personnel attended the safe and secure approach to field environment training between 30 September and 18 December. The Mission is working to provide the necessary security improvements to all concerned locations but faces significant challenges, in particular owing to limited engineering assets.

IX. International coordination

56. On 2 November, the Support and Follow-up Group on the Situation in Mali, which is chaired jointly by the African Union, ECOWAS and the United Nations, held its sixth meeting, in Bamako. The meeting provided the Group with an opportunity to exchange views with the Government on progress being made to address the challenges facing Mali. While welcoming the significant progress achieved over the past few months in stabilizing the political climate, participants reiterated the importance of implementing the preliminary agreement to ensure the effective restoration of State authority over the northern part of the country. They also expressed deep concern at the prevailing volatile security situation in northern Mali and stressed the need for a holistic and coordinated approach to address the challenges facing the Sahel region.

57. On 5 November, in Bamako, I attended the first ministerial meeting for the establishment of the coordination platform on the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. The meeting was hosted by the Government of Mali, which will chair the coordination platform for the next two years. I was joined by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the President of the World Bank, the Commissioner for Development of the European Union, the President of the African Development Bank and my Special Envoy for the Sahel. We underlined the interdependence of security and development and discussed ways to enhance coordination between the region and the international community.

X. Observations

58. Since the holding of the Presidential elections, notable progress has been made towards stabilization in Mali. This includes the holding of peaceful and transparent legislative elections marking the full return of constitutional order to the country. The Government has taken initiatives towards a consultation process, including the organization of the national forum on decentralization in Mali, the national conference on the north and the local and regional conferences on Gao. Steps were taken by the parties to implement the preliminary agreement, particularly with respect to confidence-building measures. I commend the authorities of Mali for the confidence-building measures that have been taken in the context of the preliminary agreement. I note with satisfaction that the armed groups have handed over to the Government the Governorate and the radio station in Kidal, key steps towards the full restoration of national sovereignty. I welcome the efforts of my Special Representative, in collaboration with the African Union, ECOWAS, the European Union and other key partners, to support the negotiations that resulted in those positive gestures, confirming the commitment and determination of the parties to peacefully resolve the crisis.

59. The above-mentioned conferences are only the first step on the long road to the extension of State authority throughout the country and the restoration of peace and stability in Mali. They provide an opportunity for Malians to engage in a genuine and inclusive national dialogue on the challenges facing their country and to collectively agree on the way forward to address the root causes of the crisis. I call on the armed groups to proactively support the inclusive dialogue, as well as the process of cantonment and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as called for in Security Council resolution 2100 (2013) and the preliminary agreement. I encourage all Malian actors to seize the momentum and agree on a road map for inclusive talks as soon as possible, in accordance with the preliminary agreement.

60. From 4 to 6 November, I visited Mali and held discussions with President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, on the margins of the regional ministerial meeting on the Sahel, and discussed the progress made in the implementation of the preliminary agreement. During the meeting, President Keita underlined the importance of addressing the root causes of the crisis through improved governance, the protection of human rights and the extension of State authority throughout the country. At the same time, he underscored the need for an inclusive national dialogue and reconciliation process and an inclusive approach to the legislative elections.

61. I remain deeply concerned by the prevailing volatile security situation in northern Mali, in particular the increase in terrorist attacks, which killed and injured Malian civilians and security forces, four MINUSMA soldiers and two French journalists during the reporting period. I urge the parties to the preliminary agreement to refrain from acts of provocation and violence and to work together to ensure the security of all Malians, including by establishing measures to increase security in the north, facilitate the return of refugees and extend the progressive deployment of local administration, security and defence forces throughout the country. The volatile situation and the threat of attacks can be confronted only through a combination of effective military action and cooperation, inclusive, political negotiations and progress towards early recovery.

62. The continued engagement of the international community is crucial. I call on the Government to establish a framework for concerted action through the United Nations and with the international community in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolution 2100 (2013) and the preliminary agreement to accompany the inclusive talks and negotiations with the parties signatories to that agreement. Progress has been made by the Comité de Suivi et d'Evaluation and the Commission technique mixte de sécurité in the implementation of the provisions of the ceasefire agreement, which includes the establishment of cantonment sites. However, it is important that the parties agree, as soon as possible, on further cantonment and on an effective programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. No further delays are acceptable. I call upon the international community as a whole to extend the necessary support to MINUSMA, including mobilization of additional assets and enablers, in order to facilitate the early completion of the deployment of the Mission.

63. As the country gradually moves towards greater institutional stability, it is vital for the Government to accelerate the provision of basic services to the population and other peace dividends. I call on the authorities to create conditions conducive to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and their reintegration into their communities without fear of reprisals. I am concerned that almost 0.5 million people are displaced and at least 1.4 million are in need of immediate food assistance. I call on the international community to continue and increase its assistance to the affected populations, particularly women and children, and address the gap in the funding of the consolidated appeal for Mali, recalling that only 50 per cent of the amount required has so far been mobilized. Meanwhile, it is important to bear in mind that the crisis has affected all Malians, including those living in the southern part of the country. I count on the solidarity of the international community to help alleviate the suffering of the affected populations.

64. I welcome the adoption by the Government of Mali of the Plan for the Sustainable Revival of Mali for the period 2013-2014, the Emergency Programme for the Revival of Development in the North, as well as the programme of action and the strategic guidance and priorities of the Government for the period 2013-2018. I also urge the Malian authorities and the international community to fulfil the mutual commitments undertaken during the high-level donors' conference for the development of Mali held in Brussels on 15 May 2013.

65. As the international community anticipates the successful completion of the electoral process, I call on President Keita and his cabinet to address, as a matter of priority, critical governance challenges that would enable the State to resume functioning effectively. These include institutional and security sector reforms, national dialogue and reconciliation and justice. Equally important is the fight against corruption and organized crime and the need to strengthen accountability mechanisms. In turn, those measures would help to facilitate the disbursement of pledges made at the donors' conference in May to kick-start much-needed development programmes.

66. I condemn, in the strongest terms, the attacks in Tessalit and Kidal which resulted in the death of four peacekeepers. I offer my sincere condolences to the Governments of Chad and Senegal and the family, friends and colleagues of the fallen peacekeepers. I was equally disturbed to hear of the killing of two French journalists, also in Kidal. Such acts are reprehensible and a violation of international

law. I call upon the Government to bring the perpetrators of those heinous acts to justice.

67. The challenges facing the Sahel region are numerous. I reaffirm my solidarity with the people of Mali and the Sahel and underscore the need for strengthened international cooperation to confront the challenges facing the region. I welcome the ministerial meeting hosted by the Government of Mali as an opportunity to listen to the concerns and priorities of the countries of the region and enhance coordination among international partners. I commend the African Union for its work on the enhancement of security cooperation and the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahel region, through the Nouakchott Process, launched in March 2013. There is also a clear need for a holistic and coordinated approach to address these challenges to ensure long-term security, development and stability in the Sahel. This would include the strengthening of State institutions, inclusive economic and social development, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

68. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to my Special Representative, Albert Gerard Koenders, for his leadership and steadfast support to the Government and people of Mali. I would also like to extend my appreciation to all MINUSMA staff at this critical juncture. Likewise, I extend my appreciation to bilateral partners, regional and multilateral organizations, in particular the African Union, ECOWAS and the European Union, the United Nations country team and non-governmental organizations, for their work in support of the peace process in Mali.